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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this report is to point out some of the discriminatory policies and attitudes which "tend to make the Cornell environment a difficult place for young women to achieve the personal and intellectual maturity necessary for lifelong active participation in today's society." The report opens with an excerpt from a paper by a Junior describing her campus experiences, which include strong criticisms of student, faculty, and institutional attitudes toward women. The report then details discriminatory practices in admissions policies, financial aid and housing. It suggests the provision of day-care centers, the need for sex education and a change in university clinic policy, a change in counseling practices, and the need for exposure to more female faculty members and women in positions of responsibility in administration to help change conventional stereotypes and expectations. (AF)

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The Status of Women at Cornell

Cornell claims the distinction of being one of the first universities to permit women as well as men the luxury of a good education. The past century of unequal admissions opportunities for women at Cornell, however, is easily overlooked by those who would boast progressive policies. Prejudice on the basis of sex is so inherent a part of our social system that it frequently goes unrecognized as a form of discrimination.

The Cornell environment is perpetuating the limited cultural stereotypes of femininity typical of that found on T.V. commercials and magazine advertisements instead of promoting an atmosphere in which a young woman can define herself in terms independent of her sex role. The following description of her personal campus experiences, written by a Cornell junior, perhaps best speaks to this problem.

> "Four years at Cornell is at best a mind-blowing experience and, at worst, a first rate education. So it is not without some bitterness and perhaps self-reproach that, as Junior women, we reflect upon a regressive freshman year spent in mindless activity and a sophomore year pre-occupied with reclaiming our "birthright." We mean to speak dramatically and even, forgive us, with exaggerated intensity. For after four years of being tenderly cultivated as the intellectual elite of the American high school, and almost heroically daring the strict sex quotas of Cornell admissions, we regard a campus atmosphere commensurate with our demonstrated seriousness to be our due.
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> Upon arrival we are hailed as the new herd of "coeds", branded with a huge degrading name button so that fraternity men may select their dates from a distance, and confronted with a dorm-sweety, usually chosen from a sorority, to orient us to a female's life at Cornell. And what an orientation it is: Corridor dates, fraternity teas where beer flows ankle deep, exhortation from representatives of Women's Student Government "to really rally"; even upperclass women seem to be conspiring to engulf us in a system where women are treated as objects to be dated, partied, and spirited.
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> Admittedly, things quiet down a bit after the first cultural shock, but some women never recover from the radical change in self-image experienced in the first few weeks. Indeed, the feeling of constituting a second-rate adjunct of male Cornell is reinforced by most of a woman's experiences here.
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> Inevitably, part of the discrimination against women at Cornell is built into the institution itself. We have already mentioned discriminatory admissions quotas, but this inequity is especially marked in the professionally oriented schools

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which are not considered appropriate for female aspirants: Industrial and Labor Relations, Architecture, Engineering. Even in the College of Arts and Sciences, where the male/female quota is a relatively high 2/1, women are concentrated in the so-called "artsy" majors: English, art history, languages. Fields which inspire passivity and quiet scholarship are encouraged. The more aggressive, professional or worldly oriented careers are tacitly the province of the male. This situation reflects the reality of the outside world, yet the tragedy of Cornell's treatment of women is that this bastion of open-mindedness, where "any person may find instruction in any study" has failed to liberate itself from such prejudices.

Even the noble lass who retains her spirit and ambition is hardly encouraged throughout her stay here. If she encounters some problem, she is sent to a counsellor who usually recites the university's panacea for every situation: learn to submit to authority better. One dean even threatened a female student that some day her hostilities would ruin her marriage. The young woman at Cornell is also hard put to find viable role models, to observe mature women who have put to use the kind of education they are in the process of acquiring. We leave a home situation of mothers leading considerably duller lives than we have always aspired to, only to arrive at a university where most of the women are secretaries. Outside of the predominantly female College of Human Ecology, only twenty-eight of the 1200 professors are women, and only a few are full professors.

The classroom attitude of male professors and students is often the most demoralizing atmosphere to which a woman has to submit. When displayed by a male, the most bizarre thoughts and personality traits are continually accepted with good humor as the mark of creativity and spunk. Yet similar behavior from a woman elicits doubts about her sanity, character, or motives. Eventually learning to restrain any unseemly exuberance, we begin to keep our thoughts private, and then one day bemoan the fact that women are not as articulate as their male colleagues.

If the university continnally reinforces this society's absurd definition of femininity, it virtually ignores our real biological distinction. The medical clinic has no gynecologist, has avoided hiring one over the years, and when approached with a gynecological problem proclaims self-righteously, "We don't consider this sort of thing to be a student problem." The policy on prescription of contraceptives is weak and vague, and the student must usually depend on a sympathetic doctor or illicit acquisition downtown. More often than not, the clinic will only provide a paternalistic sermon.

> But sweeping the issue of student's sex lives under the rug merely shows the maturity of an ostrich. Whether the clinic likes it or not, the sexual liberation of women is very much with us, although sometime even the women feel that their new-found freedom is a mixed bag. Stories about fraternity parties are legion, and even SDS women, companions to the most self-proclaimed radicals, often feel like revolutionary concubines and have recently formed their own organization. Authorities say that the awareness of a problem is the first step in finding a cure. Cornell women are at last becoming angry."

It is the purpose of this report to point out some of the discriminatory policies and attitudes -- both explicit and understood, which tend to make the Cornell environment a difficult place for young women to achieve the personal and intellectual maturity necessary for life-long active participation in today's society.

ADMISSIONS

The present system of quotas (ranging from 6-1 in ILR, 10-1 in Hotel, 2-1 in Arts with an overall undergraduate enrollment in the ratio of 3 males to each female) is discriminatory and irrational. Such quotas should be eliminated and admission should be based on criteria that includes motivation as well as SAT's, high school record and other indicators of ability. There should be an increase of female admissions in the professional schools where many more female applicants are rejected than admitted. In those schools where there are few female applicants (e. g. Engineering) admissions officers should use contacts with high school placement officers to encourage more girls to consider applying.

There should also be a re-examination of policies toward older women who return to college or graduate school and who do not at present receive a sympathetic hearing. Rigid residence requirements and course hours should be made more flexible for the woman with a young family.

FINANCIAL AID

In its description of scholarships and prizes open to Arts and Science undergraduates, the Cornell catalogue lists awards totalling $5,045 annually to be distributed on the basis of sex. Of this amount, women are only eligible to receive 15% or $760 as compared to $4,285 for men.

Cornell should refuse to allow any more scholarships to be established which place limitations on the sex of the recipient. It should also move to rectify the current imbalance either by changing the qualifications of existing scholarships or providing compensatory funds for women.

HOUSING

A married woman graduate student is currently forbidden to live in so-called "married student housing". This policy particualrly discriminates against widows and divorcees with children and foreign students. Although appropriate authorities have been informed that this is a clear violation of civil rights, no action has been taken to correct the situation. Requirements based on financial need rather than sex should be established immediately.

HOUSING

Until recently sophomore women were required to live in the dorms while sophomore men were not. In loco parentis arguments in support of discriminatory residence requirements (and house rules) can only be made on the basis of age, not sex. To follow the latter course is to reinforce the double standard and the notion of woman as "object" or "property".

We assume that the official policy of allowing pregnant unmarried women and married undergraduates to retain their university housing and student status and financial aid is being fully implemented.

DAYCARE

Serious consideration should also be given to providing day care facilities for male and female students as part of the housing program. Day care facilities are clearly needed by all members of the Cornell community -- faculty, students and employees. Such a service would not only eliminate the economic elitism of existing facilities but would significantly reduce attrition rates and turnover of students and employees.

SEX EDUCATION AND CLINIC POLICY

As a university which aspires to provide a setting where "any person may find instruction in any study", Cornell has missed the chance to offer its students some of the most "relevant" information any college age men and women will need, want, or use. Sex educators throughout the country will vouch for the fact that a great deal of ignorance and misinformation concerning contraception continues to exist even in this generation's university population. Ithaca gynecologists and local counseling agencies will attest to the fact that significant enough numbers of unwanted pregnancies occur each semester at Cornell to warrant preventive action.

Unfortuantely, because it is only a minority of the community which actually suffers the visible effects of this information-gap, little has been done to alleviate the situation. It is the Cornell coed, who endures the dangers and fear of an underground abortion over Spring vacation; or has to ask for a leave of absence; or completely drops out of school. Her male counterpart suffers at best the fee for the abortion and at worst a hasty wedding. His educational career however, is unlikely to be seriously damaged by the accident.

Information alone is not sufficient for this particular problem. Clinic physicians should also feel free to prescribe whatever form of contraception they feel is medically advisable for their patients -- male or female -- who request it. Any doctor who feels it is against his or her moral principles to do so should not have to. However, there should be a gynecologist at the clinic for Cornell's more than 3,000 women students, and students must know at least one doctor to whom they can go to at the clinic for contraceptive advice and prescriptions. (A more detailed discussion of the legal aspects of this problem is included in the appendix,)

COUNSELING

Traditional counseling emphasizes women's adaptation to their traditional roles in society. Cornell's placement office maintains a "special" bulletin board labeled "Opportunities for Women" which describes "Exciting Secretarial Opportunities" followed by a list of typing school scholarships, with no mention of executive training programs except where it is a uniquely feminine field like clothes merchandising. Likewise women are encouraged to resign themselves to the low salaries offered to them on the grounds that they can't be counted on to continue and make a career in the profession.

Cornell placement has also allowed visiting recruiters to request to see only male applicants for positions which women are equally qualified for. This is particularly true in the case of recruiters who interview students from professional schools like Hotel Administration.

The informal counseling of the faculty is an equally important area in which Cornell is failing to raise rather than lower the expectations and aspirations of its female students. Too many tradition-bound male faculty members are encouraging their women students to "be practical" about their plans for the future, advising them to withhold committing themselves to a specific discipline or profession until they are sure it will fit in conveniently with a husband and children. This "realistic" advice merely eliminates the acceptance of responsibility of making a lifelong career decision which is like any other step in the maturing process.

ROLE MODELS

Exposure to more female faculty members and women in positions of responsibility in administration would go a long way toward changing conventional stereotypes and expectations. Currently the Cornell coed's role models are female Insturctors and Assistant Professors working at lower salaries with less chance for promotion or tenure than their male counterparts.

The Personnel Office reinforces this pattern by giving almost all women who apply a typing test (unless they are placed immediately in the kitchens), whether or not they have a B. A. or other skills, and offering them positions for which they are usually over-qualified. Cornell needs to seriously re-evaluate its wage and promotion schedules, with an eye to eliminating current discriminations.

The curriculum is one of the obvious places in which girls can be exposed to "role models" of educated and intelligent women who have led fruitful and creative lives by contributing to their society in more ways than raising a family or working behind the scene for their husbands. The experimental Spring course, CDFR 400, which studied sex differences and the nuclear family, offered a radical re-evaluation of sex role stereotypes currently found in sociology, psychology, history, and, literature. Such courses could provide invaluable help to the student who wants to learn more about her sex and its special problems, while seeking to define herself independent of her sex role.

CONCLUSION

On this campus, discriminatory incidents occur daily which are taken for granted by both the persons who commit them and the women who are subjected to them.

A female doctoral candidate was recently requested to turn in her stack pass because she was pregnant and was thereby demonstrating her "lack of motivation and commitment to research".

The wife of a graduate student who arrived first at Cornell was not allowed to pick up the keys to her married student apartment because "men alone" could sign.

A 22-year old female student requested contraceptives from a clinic doctor and was asked to disclose how long she had known the man, whether she planned to marry him, and how many others she had had intercourse with. After declining to prescribe any form of contraception he referred her to another doctor downtown, who charged her for the visit but only gave her a lecture on morals and no medical advice except to abstain.

A female alumna who is a paid member of the New York City Cornell Club is forbidden to use the dining room from 12-2:30 weekly; or the second floor bar from 12-5 and 6-8:30 p.m. "Bar and Sandwich service" from 11:30 a.m. to 11:30 p.m. is for "Men Only." This "Men Only" policy is all carefully explained on page four of the New York Cornell Club Handbook. While some may find this worthy of a snicker and a worn quip about the "sanctity" of men's clubs, such policies for a co-ed university club not only violate whatever pretensions Cornell may have had of calling itself a co-ed university -- but more so, it violates the civil rights of its own alumnae.

Cornell has recently witnessed the formation of a Chapter of N. O. W., the National Organization for Women. The response has been overwhelming, and favorable at all levels of the university -- students, faculty, employees. Clearly something is wrong when so many women are angered enough by their environmental conditions to begin an organized assault on the status quo.

This report has made a number of proposals, which if ignored can only continue the costly cnnsequences of confrontation politics, but if implemented, could mark the beginning of Cornell's return to progressive leadership in the education of women.

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